

THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
IN RELATION TO
Politics and Public Questions.

A Sermon

PREACHED BEFORE THE SYNOD OF MONTREAL AND OTTAWA,

APRIL 16TH, 1889,

IN

St. Andrew's Church,

QUEBEC,

BY

REV. W. D. ARMSTRONG, M.A., PH. D.,

MODERATOR.

THE SYNOD TENDERED THEIR HEARTY THANKS TO THE MODERATOR FOR HIS
ABLE AND TIMELY DISCOURSE, REQUESTED THE MANUSCRIPT FOR
PUBLICATION, AND APPOINTED A COMMITTEE TO ARRANGE
FOR THE PRINTING AND CIRCULATION
OF THE SAME.

OTTAWA :
JAMES HOPE & Co., PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS.

1889.



THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

— IN RELATION TO —

Politics and Public Questions.

Isaiah, 62:6:—"I have set Watchmen upon Thy Walls, O Jerusalem."

Ministers of the Gospel are called heralds because they herald forth or proclaim the King's message--the Gospel of eternal life to a sin-ruined, guilty world. They are called watchmen upon the walls of Zion, because they are expected to be on the look-out and give warning against the approach of the foe. It is not only the duty of the Christian Minister to seek to win new conquests for Christ, but to hold that which has already been won. Is there any victory that Religion can win? Thither he is to carry her banner. Is there any foe assaulting her tower? It is his duty to seek to drive the enemy from the gates.

In heralding the truth, and defending the truth the sphere of the Christian minister takes in all classes of men and all departments of life. But there is one great department of life into which a minister is told he must not intrude—a department of life too fraught with weal or woe for the community, and for the souls of men. I refer to the department of politics.

In the discussion that has arisen in this land in reference to Jesuit aggression, ministers have been plainly told, even by honourable legislators—"preach the Gospel,

leave politics alone." One might swiftly retort, "we preach the Gospel and therefore cannot let politics alone."

The minister preaches prohibition, and the saloon-keepers cry out—"What have we to do with thee. Let us alone. Go, preach the Gospel." We preach against unholy combinations in trade, and greedy monopolists cry out, "What do ministers know about business? Let us alone. Go, preach the Gospel." Ministers preach against dishonesty and truculency in politics, and slaves to party cry out—"What do ministers know about politics? Let us alone. Go, preach the Gospel." Do these men think that politics should be hermetically sealed against the good influences of God's word? Do they think that the conduct of politicians should not be weighed in the scales and measured with the measure of the sanctuary?

What is wrong with the politics of our land to-day is that they are not permeated with the religion of Christ, with righteousness, truth and charity.

One is tempted to ask what are the motives that prompt this cry that ministers should not take part in politics and public questions? In some cases I believe it to be pure ignorance. They who make it do not know what the preacher's function is. They do not expect him to deal with the vital affairs of mundane life. They are afraid his sanctity will be injured if he does. Their ideal of a minister of the Gospel is a man who is a sort of a child or novice in his knowledge of mankind and of the ordinary affairs of life—not a man with soul and mind and heart alive to all human interests, and who, by the study of the noblest Book, and by reflection

upon the ways of God in the history of the past, and by a mind trained to revolve around the poles of truth and charity, is competent to speak to the profoundest necessities of human life.

If you accept the weak ideal that some have of the Christian minister, or accept as true the wretched, mean, untruthful portraitures that you sometimes find in the modern novel, you may well say to such ministers, "keep away from the vital, serious concerns of life."

But is this the type of the preachers of the Gospel as you know them? Is this the type of the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Canada? Far from it. Call the roll of our ministers from Halifax to Vancouver, Presbytery by Presbytery. Take them man by man and where will you find in this country a class of men better educated, better grounded in the principles of truth and liberty, more intense or wiser lovers of their country or more assiduously intent upon bringing the blessings of religion, virtue, comfort and good government to the people? Of the whole 900 you may find a few who are not wise, who are not thoughtful, you may find a few vain demagogues. But 99 per cent. of them belong to the class that I have described, and no class in the land is more competent to form and express opinions on moral, social and political questions.

But in analysing this cry against ministers taking part in public affairs, I think I can discern a tone of vanity which epitomized is this—"Preach your Gospel and leave the great things of politics to us who are so much wiser." Would I be wrong also in supposing that sometimes the cry comes from the envious spirit—the politician and the press vexed that others than

themselves should have influence in guiding the nation's destiny ?

But whatever be the motive, whether it be to guard the sanctity of the sacred office, or whether it be from ignorance of the true function of the preacher of the Gospel, whether it arise from the spirit of vanity or the spirit of envy, it is a wrong and injurious cry. Would it not be wiser to say ? "Ministers of the Gospel come to close quarters with your people in all that affects them and their interests. Apply the principles of that Book whose expounders you are, to the whole domain of life. Bring religion into politics, into commerce, into education, into everything—preach the Gospel so that it may come to the lives of men. Do not hesitate to send the shot and shell of Bible righteousness straight into that group of profane Sabbath breakers, into that nest of covetous traders or into that clique of political intriguers."

Now let me state three or four reasons why ministers of the Gospel should take an active interest in all public questions that affect the welfare of the nation ?

1. PREACHERS OF THE GOSPEL SHOULD TAKE PART IN POLITICS AND QUESTIONS AFFECTING THE STATE BECAUSE THEY ARE, OR OUGHT TO BE, MEN OF STRONG PATRIOTIC SENTIMENTS.—Indeed it seems to me that no one imbued with the teachings of the Bible can fail to be in the highest sense patriotic. Where will you find national feeling more intense ? Where will you find love of country more ardent than among the Jews ? In Bible history from Moses to Malachi what grand patriots stand forth in the law-givers, the judges, the poets, the prophets of Israel ! Where will you find more profound

patriotism than in the intercessory prayer of Moses for sinning Israel? Where will you find more practical patriotism than in the self-denying, energetic Nehemiah? Where will you find greater depth and tenderness of love for native land than in that grand old patriot prophet Jeremiah? Hear him: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" The same spirit we recognize in that noble Jewish patriot, the great Apostle of the Gentiles. And, in all reverence be it said of Him who was the perfect man on earth, the Son of God, that we discern the spirit of patriotism as well as of compassion in his tears over the doomed Jerusalem.

This Bible is saturated with patriotism, and they who catch its spirit and expound its meaning must be patriotic. They cannot be indifferent to the welfare and good government of their country.

The prophets were the preachers of their day, and they did not hesitate to put themselves in close connection with the national life. Was there any defection from loyalty? They exposed it. Was there a vice eating like a canker at the heart of the nation's life, they lifted up their voice against it. Were there men or classes of men ready to sell their country for gold or bartering for place the liberties of the nation, they denounced them in no measured terms.

But we the preachers of to-day are not to be like the stout preachers of those olden times. Our voices are to be weak and tuneful, the atmosphere around us so quiet and holy that the great throb of life in good and evil is not to be felt in it. Ours is a sacred calling.

So sacred that we can see injustice in the land and not rebuke it;—so sacred that we can see greed of gain and greed of place leading men to sacrifice the interests of the nation and not denounce them;—so sacred that we are to look on the systematized misrepresentations of party press, and platform, and not expose these monstrous shapes of falsehood and uncharitableness;—so sacred that we can look on the knife pointed at the heart of our civil liberty and make no vigorous effort to strike it away;—so sacred that we are calmly to look upon a power advancing with stealthy yet steady step with the avowed object of fettering the very Gospel of liberty that we preach, and yet we are not to utter the warning cry or urge the marshalling of forces that shall stay the advance of the enemy.

Away with such an idea of the preacher as this. We will not let politics alone. The nation is God's institution. It can flourish only under God's truth, baptized with the righteousness and charity that the Gospel unfolds.

I raise no objection to the reverence and respect paid to the Christian ministry for their office sake. I recognize the truth that is at the bottom of the dislike the people have to see their minister mingle too freely in the common affairs of life. There is something in a consecrated class of men just as there is in consecrated buildings. But the Christian minister is a Christian citizen, a Christian patriot, and in preaching the Gospel, in a way and tone that becomes his calling, he is to support everything that makes for righteousness in a nation, and to boldly strike down all wrong doing and iniquity, and he is not a meddler or intruder if he seek to do this in the region of politics.

2. THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL SHOULD TAKE PART IN GREAT PUBLIC QUESTIONS BECAUSE HE IS OR OUGHT TO BE A MAN OF PHILANTHROPIC SYMPATHIES.— Is there anything affecting the comfort, the welfare of the people that is outside the minister's thoughts and sympathies?

Is there sufficient recognition of the benevolent aspects of the Christian ministry, of the fact that they come seeking to bring blessings of the highest order to the community, of the fact that by choice and consecration like their Master they have set themselves to go about doing good?

Look at the work and worldly reward of the Christian ministry

They seek to prepare themselves thoroughly by a long continued course of study in the world's wisdom, and by careful and prayerful study of God's Book of Wisdom, and then they give themselves to the work of delivering men from ignorance and vice and doom. They relinquish dreams of ambition. They live on salaries scarcely sufficient to provide the necessities of life, and give themselves without reserve to the advancement of the physical, intellectual, social and spiritual welfare of mankind.

It is a paltry business to watch for failure in this lofty ideal, and to gloat over spots in ministerial character.

Look at the men as a class. Where do you find a class of men giving themselves so thoroughly, so unreservedly, so continuously to the promotion of human welfare?

Look at them, and consider the noble conceptions,

the sublime thoughts and sentiments they sow with ceaseless energy in the hearts of men. Look at them as individuals or in associations. What do you see? You see them, day and night, seeking to devise means for promoting happiness, virtue and comfort among the people, to promote every enterprise that aims at elevating and enobling the people. You find them entering into conflict with every foe that threatens the home, the Church, the country. You find them establishing and fostering schools in the higher and lower departments of learning. You find them where help is needed for the weak, sympathy for the suffering, comfort for the sorrowing. You find them everywhere seeking to nurture in the community, holy, upright men and women. You find them more anxious often than the parents are for the welfare of the children and the youth, more tender than the children are for the comfort and cheer of the aged. You find them everywhere the promoters of law and order, good government and peace, so that they may rejoice in, rather than resent, the name "spiritual police."

The idea of telling such men to let politics alone, when politics are not ministering to the welfare of the country, when political parties are ready to barter away, it may be, some of God's choicest gifts to the people. These men are with their fellow men in their profoundest needs, and from their sympathy with these needs, and study of God's Law, know better than the professional politician even, "what makes a nation great and keeps it so."

I make bold to state, that, in all civilized communities, the most potent influences for good in national life

come not from the press and the politician, but from the school teacher and the preacher. The preacher who does not hesitate to denounce wrong, the preacher who does not hesitate to hold up a lofty ideal of citizenship and a lofty ideal too of the sacred duties of the citizen's representative, the preacher who quickens growing minds with great thoughts as to human dignity and destiny, with far reaching, patriotic and philanthropic ideas—is making citizens and statesmen. He may occupy some back country pulpit or a pulpit in a metropolitan city,—the country, the world may know little of him, but God only knows the harvest that springs from his sowing.

The following statement of Dr. Spring, should be well pondered: "Many a sleeping genius, resposing within the curtains of its own unconscious powers, has been awakened to hope and action by the instructions of the sanctuary. It were a curious and not unprofitable inquiry to institute how many well-educated men in Christian lands have received the first impulse and suggestion in their lofty career from the instructions of the Sabbath." It is instructive to place in connexion with this the statement of one who was a practical politician, Fowell Buxton:—"Whatever I have done in my life for Africa, the seeds of it were sown in my heart in Wheeler Street Chapel." Therefore we say preach politics by applying the Gospel to them, by applying the measure of God and right to them. Saturate politics, if possible, with the religion of Christ. Separation of Church and State surely does not mean the separation of religion from politics.

3. This leads to a third proposition—**THAT MINIS-**

TERS SHOULD TAKE PART IN GREAT PUBLIC QUESTIONS BECAUSE THEY ARE, OR OUGHT TO BE, MORAL LEADERS IN THE COMMUNITY. It is their duty, as the representatives of religion and morality, to apply the highest ethical principles to all the departments of life.

It is for the Minister to lead, not to be lead or pushed on from behind.

Is it not true that great reforms are sometimes germinated and cherished by the preaching of the Gospel, could not exist or live without the preaching of the Gospel, yet christless men are allowed to steal the fruitage, and lead on with the humanitarian cry and so Christ and His messengers are defrauded and dishonoured? Or it may be a press, equally christless, steps in and claims the honour. The press, where it throws itself upon the side of truth and righteousness, should be welcomed as the great ally of the preacher. But surely living men with throbbing hearts reaching their fellow men with voice and eye need not yield in influence to the dead page of a newspaper or periodical.

Preach the Gospel. Yes. And, when you preach, be sure that you know what movements are among the people, and adapt the Gospel to these movements. There are great questions agitating the public now. Are they to be left to editors and politicians? Is the Temperance question to be left to them? Are ministers not to speak out with regard to dishonest business combinations? with regard to debasing political combinations? Are they not to bring the law of righteousness, and the Gospel of love to bear upon the great conflict between Capital and Labour, upon that strife which the Gospel alone can heal? Are they not to stand up and

organize and fight against the greed of gain and love of pleasure that would defraud the working man of God's great gift, the Day of Rest? Are they not to lead out against party politics when party politicians seem ready to sell our Protestant liberties to gain Papist votes?

The Protestant pulpit must be used to check Papal aggression. Not long ago a Bill was introduced into the Legislature of New York for the purpose of giving special privileges to Roman Catholic clergy in public institutions. The Evangelical Alliance of New York protested. Petitions were poured into the Legislature at Albany—but it seemed as if the politicians were determined to pass the bill. The pulpit was appealed to, and on a single Sunday thousands of sermons were preached against Papal aggression. The politicians heard them, or heard the people talk about them. The State was roused and the politicians felt themselves compelled to throw out the Bill.

We are in the presence of a very decided Jesuit aggression in our land. Shall we listen when politicians say,—“mind your own business; do not intrude into politics?”

But the Pope, the great parson, can intrude, and the priest, whose exhortation commands the vote, without educating it, is to be treated with consideration.

Shall we listen to their *cant* when they enjoin upon Protestant ministers to be tolerant,—when all that Protestant ministers are doing is to assert their rights and the liberty of the Gospel in the face of an intolerance that is formulated, systematized and openly acknowledged—an intolerance that curtly declares—“By our principles we cannot give to you Protestants liberty, whilst we demand liberty from you according to your principles?”

Protestant ministers, Presbyterian ministers will not be hood-winked or silenced on this great question that affects their freedom and the welfare of the State.

Ministers of the Gospel should not hesitate to let their people know that they are deeply interested in this great question, that they are deeply interested in every public question, that they give thought and study to them, that they watch their progress, that they are ready to fight for the right that is in them, and smite the wrong that is in them.

But what do ministers know about these practical things? On a very slender thread of evidence there is hung a weighty assertion, that ministers are not practical men. It is not true. They are in the highest sense practical. It is true the minister may not be able to make a shoe, but he can tell when a shoe trade is honestly carried on as quickly as another man. It is true he may not be able to manage the intricacies of a great railway line, but he can tell when these lines are run so as to be injurious to the physical and moral welfare of the men employed. He may not be the most competent man to manage a party caucus. But, by applying God's measure, he can tell as well as any other man whether political actions are right or wrong, and therefore beneficial or injurious to the community.

Therefore, when they say to us, "keep to what you understand, and do not meddle with politics," we may reply that we have equal advantages even with politicians, for understanding ethical questions in trade and politics, and social questions in trade and politics.

Ministers of the Gospel are inclined to take high moral ground on every question, and simply because they do so, other things being equal, their judgements

will be sounder and safer than the judgments of those who follow what is called practical, prudential policy. I have no hesitation in saying that a strong moral sense in a man helps wonderfully to make his insight deeper, truer, more far reaching than that of the man governed by the idea of policy only. If God rules—then righteousness and policy must be identical. A strong moral sense developed by the Gospel said,—“slavery is wrong; it must be abolished.” The money interest fought against its abolition, and policy argued against its abolition. But the moral sense was right in its insight and won the victory. So will it be for us in every case if we but faithfully and fearlessly preach God’s truth.

I will take an illustration from a cause that has recently received, in appearance at least, a strong back-set—the cause of Prohibition. The clear moral judgment says the liquor traffic is wrong, pernicious and ought to be abolished. The practical politician sneers at this as an extreme view. I take pleasure in recording my confidence here that it will come, and that sometime Prohibition will be the cry of policy.

Let ministers, therefore, aim to be thoughtful, firm, decided moral leaders in all those movements that affect the social and spiritual welfare of their fellow men. And if some man nuzzling in the mire of party politics, and absorbed in its low aims and intrigues, forgetful of the light of heaven and the God that rules over all, turns up his earth-attracted eye and says, “What do you know about politics?” Answer, “from my position it is possible for me to know even better than you do what courses of politics tend to righteousness, honour, and the country’s weal.”

4. PREACHERS SHOULD NOT KEEP ALOOF FROM POLITICS WHEN ANY QUESTION AFFECTING THE FREE INSTITUTIONS OF THE LAND ARE BEING DISCUSSED, BECAUSE IT WAS THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL THAT MADE FREE INSTITUTIONS POSSIBLE, AND ONLY IN THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL CAN THEY BE MAINTAINED.

The influence of preaching in a nation's history is not easily traced. But the influence has been at the very heart of the history of all modern free nations. Kings and warriors, battles and political intrigues figure largely in the historic page. But the mighty influences moulding the national life cannot be chronicled as startling facts.

Yet there is enough on the surface to establish the proposition I have laid down.

Trace the origin and development of national liberty in Germany, and you find in its very life blood the preaching of Luther; in Switzerland that of Zwingle and Calvin; in England the preaching of Tyndall, of Cranmer, of Ridley and Latimer and the Puritans; in Scotland the preaching of John Knox and his associates and their thousands of successors; in the United States in their struggle for liberty, the preaching of Witherspoon, the Mathers, Davies, Stanhope, Smith, &c. So great was the influence that Horace Walpole, writing of the revolution said: "There is no good crying about the matter, Cousin America had run away with a Presbyterian parson and that was the end of it."

Let any one but thoughtfully trace the influence of the Protestant Gospel and Protestant preacher in obtaining and establishing the liberties of modern free nations, and the sneer against preachers meddling in politics will

be changed into profound respect for what preachers have done in developing, defending and sanctifying the free political institutions that are the boast of our Christian lands. Not too much, but too little, has the Protestant pulpit been used of late for the declaration of those principles of righteousness and liberty without which a nation can neither be exalted nor free.

Protestant ministers do not desire to be Popes in politics. They do not desire, like the ecclesiastics of Rome, control in political affairs. Nor do they consider it in accord with their sacred duty to play the part of the vociferous demagogue. But as a class of citizens, thoughtful, educated, imbued with the spirit of Gospel liberty, as men of high moral inspiration and purpose, as patriots, philanthropists, as responsible moral leaders in the community it is their right and their duty to speak out calmly, yet fearlessly concerning every question that affects the rights, the liberties, the virtue and the happiness of the community in which God has cast their lot.
